**Luke 9:51-62 Luke 9:51-62**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 9 here re-reading these words. “As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ To another he said, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In May of 2022 the inflation rate in the United States of America hit 8.6%, the highest rate since December of 1981 before I was even born. Energy prices rose 34.6%, gasoline went up 48.7% and food costs went up 10%. But I’m sure this isn’t a shock to you. I’m guessing this isn’t the first you’ve heard about inflation in our country. Costs rising isn’t an easy thing to ignore and the reason behind it is varied. You could say it’s because of lingering problems caused by the pandemic or the ongoing war in Ukraine…..you can point and blame anything you’d like really it doesn’t really change the fact that things cost more. The fact is we’re in the middle of it and there’s not much we can do to get out of it as citizens. But here in church there is no inflation when it comes to your membership, there isn’t a fee that goes up and down. There is no sacrament fee, faith fee, prayer fee, I won’t charge you anything to come and pray with you at your house or visit you if you are sick, that’s not how the church works. Salvation remains the free gift it is, won by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for you on the cross. Yet still, in our faith, and in our lives as Christians there is a cost to discipleship, one that we find in our Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel lessons for today, and like everything else in our world, that cost is going up.

Elijah’s cost of discipleship in our Old Testament lesson is martyrdom on account of being God’s prophet, a cost that couldn’t possibly be any higher. He faces life and death at the hands of those who have forsaken the covenant of God, thrown down his altars, and killed other prophets before Elijah. It is the greatest cost to lose your life for the faith, but it can’t be dismissed as some sort of scare tactic, it has happened quite a bit in the history of the church and it will continue until the Lord returns. In our Epistle lesson Paul writes to the Church in Galatia about the cost of discipleship. While there still remains the threats of violence, Paul lays out very clearly the battle going on between the flesh and the Spirit and to be a disciple of Christ means that we do not give in to the desires of the flesh and rather are guided by the Spirit. To sum it up the cost of discipleship is found in verse 17, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” That’s the cost, and in our world, that cost is high. To refrain from doing everything you want to do all the time is the cost, and if anything, that cost continues to rise in a world that constantly gives you new and exciting things to do that are contrary to the Word of God. That cost of self sacrifice is high in a world that compliments you for being you no matter what it is that you do and it is the norm to do whatever you want. To do something you don’t want to do is insane, life’s too short, who would ever purposely do that? Which just shows the cost of discipleship and how high it is, to fight back against the notion that you don’t always get to do what you want.

Which brings us to our Gospel lesson, from Luke chapter 9, as Jesus and his followers encounter a Samaritan village and are rejected. James and John see this and ask if they can be the bringers of destruction upon these Samaritans by calling fire to rain down on them and destroy them. Jesus rebukes them. There’s another cost. We as God’s people delight in destruction of others, we seek it, we want it, we would love to do it, but when in all of Jesus’ miracles did he call down fire to destroy and bring destruction upon his enemies or those who reject him? The cost of discipleship then is a lack of revenge that we would want to see. But the greater costs are found in the second part. A man wants to follow Jesus, but he will have to sacrifice having a stable home. Another is asked to serve but he wants to take care of his responsibilities as a son in burying his father, but the need is too urgent, the dead will bury the dead, there is more important things to do like spreading the Good News of the kingdom of God. Finally a third man wants to say goodbye, but again, the cost is great and you can’t be distracted or drawn away from the work that God has called you to do. You have to be all in, you can’t plow while doing other things, you need both hands, and so we see the cost of discipleship means leaving everything behind: stability, family and comfort and moving forward to follow Jesus wherever he goes.

As I said earlier back in 1981 I wasn’t even born, but let me ask you this if you were around, was the cost of discipleship higher or lower in 1981? Was it easier to be a Christian back in the 80s? When I go to different churches and serve and look at their history and what they had done and what they are doing now sadly all I tend to see is decay. I see pictures and read reports of groups, events, and trophies of sports leagues that all have stopped, been discontinued, and just haven’t happened in a long time. Pretty much my entire life I have been part of a church in decline and lived in a society where Christianity seems to be on it’s way out. Where it’s openly mocked and ridiculed and where being a Christian is something that you hide rather than boast about. Which to me seems to say that the cost of discipleship is higher, that like everything else it’s price is increasing which leads to less use of it. When the cost is low you can use things with reckless abandon, the stakes are low and the risk is low, but when the cost is high you have to be careful, and these days, being a Christian is a risk, a risk that many aren’t willing to take.

After all, who wants to be killed for speaking the truth of God’s Word like the prophets of Elijah’s time? Who wants to be kept from doing the things they want to do like Paul talks about in Galatians? Who wants to live their life as a nomad with no stable home and having to rely on the hospitality of others? Who wants to miss important moments with their family on account of their responsibilities to God and the Church? And when we look at it like that, and see it all on paper before us, the cost is too high, and we wonder why we or anyone else would ever want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? But that answer is a simple one. Inflation statistics say that gas prices have risen 48.7% in May 2022, I quoted that statistic at the beginning of our message today, but without gas, how are you going to drive your vehicle and get around? I quoted that food prices have risen 10% in May, well what’s the alternative? Are you just not going to eat? Lastly we’ve seen that the cost of discipleship has risen, but what’s the alternative? To whom else shall we go? Jesus has the words of eternal life. The reality is that the cost can skyrocket but there is no alternative to being a disciple of Jesus Christ which means that no matter what we face in this world we face it, and get through it, and find strength in our Lord because He has overcome this world and has already suffered the punishment of our sins. We have a Savior who looks at those who rejected him, and pities them, and wishes for them to live rather than for them to be destroyed in a rain of fire. We have a Savior who speaks the truth to those who come to him and want to follow him in love. Discipleship isn’t easy, it would be wrong to pretend that it is, yet we all are called to be witnesses of God’s love in our lives and to show the world that in spite of hardships and troubles we still have faith, we are led by the Holy Spirit, and we produce the fruits of the Spirit rather than the fruits of the flesh. We show others love. We have joy in what we do despite the cost. We have peace with God and are patient and kind to those around us. We are faithful to God and His Word which is good and molds how we act and live our lives.

On Friday, as I was preaching at Margie Reckow’s funeral something happened in our country that I thought I would never be alive to see. Roe v Wade was overturned. What this means for the unborn is life, and we believe as Christians that life begins at conception. We believe that we are not just born sinful, but as it states in Psalm 51:5, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” We also believe as it states in Psalm 139:13-14 that God “created my inmost being and knit me together in my mother’s womb.” That we were “Fearfully and wonderfully made.” What this also means is that each state will have battles of their own to be waged on how they move forward with this issue and that our country will be challenged to find common ground and understanding. It will also mean, my dear friends in Christ, that the cost of discipleship has once again, gone up. And that we must treat those who are filled with wrath, anger, and frustration at this decision with the motivation that Jesus had with the Samaritans who rejected him as we read about in our Gospel lesson. We must pray for understanding, and that we can take the clear message of the Gospel, and forgiveness, and love to those who are hurting. Our Synodical President Matthew Harrison, a few days ago said this about the decision, and I think it encompasses the challenge and the path forward. President Harrison writes, “Today is a monumental day, a day on which we simultaneously rejoice, pray, give thanks, lament, repent and weep.” To be a disciple is to learn from Christ, to follow His example and to lean on his understanding, despite the costs, and what our sinful flesh wants to do. So pray for our nation, pray for each other, pray for peace and an end to violence against those who are just trying to help. Pray for your enemies even more than you pray for your friends and remember that while the cost of discipleship is high, the benefit is greater, there is no safer place to be than in the arms of your Savior Jesus Christ, who died for you, rose for you, and loves you. He will be your home, your family, your joy, and your answer to the hard times in this life.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.